

NHVVH Care Team Profile: *Diane Cooper, RN BC*

When Diane Cooper, RN BC, wears her traditional nursing white uniform and cap to work on Nurses Day each year, she isn't surprised at the reactions she gets. One resident with dementia sees Diane in her white uniform and makes an instant connection with the past. Another resident—who served in Vietnam—says the traditional outfit helps him relax.

"You look like a *real* nurse," one resident says. "I want *you* to give me my medicine!" Another resident—a World War II nurse—sees Diane's cap and calls out, "My sister!" Diane reminisces with the resident about their nursing caps. Nowadays most nurses don't wear caps, but years ago "capping" was one of the most important milestones of nursing school. Each nursing school and hospital had its own cap design, which was meant to give the students a sense of pride and ownership in "their" school. The capping ceremony also included a vow taken by the student nurses to behave ethically and honor the nursing profession.

Diane Cooper wanted to be a nurse for as long as she can remember, and has been in the field for 39 years, as a nurses' aide, a surgical technician, an emergency medical technician, a registered nurse, a home health care nurse, and for the past seven years, a nurse at the New Hampshire Veterans Home. She says, "It's an honor to work here. I get to give back. I tell the residents, 'We have the freedoms we have today because of what you did for us.' Being a nurse here is extra special because our residents are veterans."

Cooper also knows what it's like to be on the receiving end of care. "I am a cancer survivor," she says, "and that has made me a better nurse. It was hard being a patient—you feel so out of control—so I understand how our residents sometimes feel. I've learned that all behavior has meaning. Sometimes a person acts a certain way, not because they want to be difficult, but because they may be feeling sick or sad or frustrated—or all of the above."

Anne Howe, RNC, MSN, Director of Resident Care Programs, is leading the culture change movement at the Veterans Home—transforming the traditional hospital-based model of long term care into a place that really feels like a home. She says, "When Diane wears her traditional nursing uniform on Nurses Day she honors the history of nursing, the honesty and integrity, respect and pride we associate with the profession. Although today we recognize that a white uniform isn't practical for everyday use, it's important to remember our roots and to honor all that nursing stands for."

Cooper, a Nursing Coordinator, is also an evening supervisor, which means she coordinates nursing activities to ensure the implementation of individualized resident care and treatment plans. She explains, "I am responsible for all employees and residents in the building. There is no other management here at night so I am it." She is proud to be a mentor to her staff. She firmly believes "There are no stupid questions—only lessons learned." She adds, "This is a wonderful place. I learn as much from my staff as they learn from me. They do a phenomenal job and I thank them every day. You see, everybody here really cares—whether they work in nursing, housekeeping, maintenance—whatever. There's no difference."

Diane Cooper, RN BC, in her traditional nursing uniform, with Hank Keeler, a Marine Corps veteran and NHVVH resident.

